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arglebargle!

monday, july 31, 2006

Realm of the Squirrel-Man

Okay, too many coincidences are guiding my hand on this particular post. Nearly 30 years ago fanzines were as much of a regular purchase for me as comics books and Warren Monster magazines. I picked up nearly every issue of RBCC and JFFJ that I could get my hands on, just to name a couple. Sometime in 9th grade Jim Ritchey III (he was in 10th) started championing the idea of doing a fanzine of our *own*. He and Dave Newton had put out a Mad-magazine type xerox mag called "*Flipped!*" when they were in 8th grade and assured us it would be a snap. Unfortunately for JR III, (who was a bit of a perfectionist) we all finshed our shorter back-up stories long before he was halfway through his epic 12 pager. I took the stance that if we didn't get our mag --now called *Realm*--out by the end of our sophmore year that we might never get it out. We staged a bit of a coup, (...sorry JR III.) moved all the stories up a rung and thanks to the 60$ my parents put up for the printing, and the cigar-chompin' printer who liked me enough to stay open til 2 in the morning, we came to school the week before the start of summer vacation with 300 copies of our 30-page fanzine of comics and science-fiction stories.
...And even though we were 10th graders, our magazine still had a pro-cover by Scott Hampton! (Unbelievably, Scott sold classmate and magazine contributor Pat St. Amour this great piece of original art at a

about me

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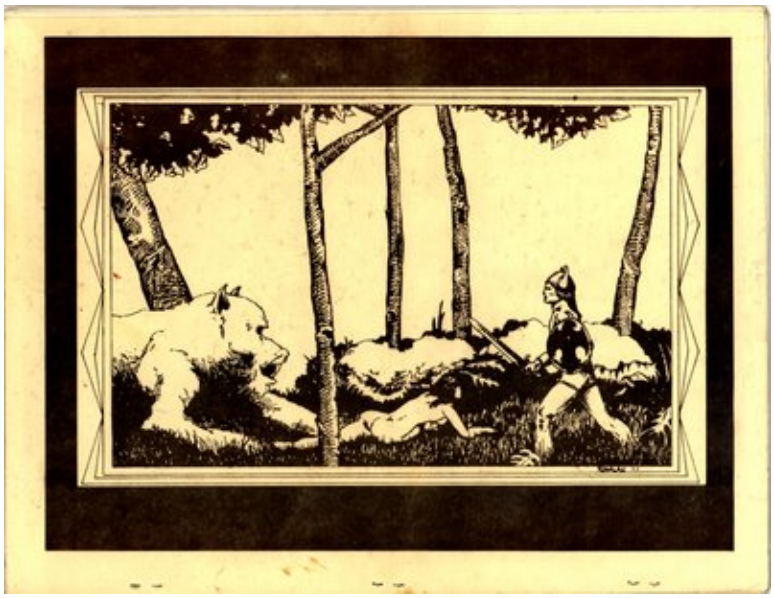
convention --done when Scott was only 16--for only 15$! When the rest of us saw it we all agreed it should be the cover. Pat did the logo as well.)

The back cover was done by another classmate and contributor, Rik Lowe --though he signed it Rik Alan. (Think he was into Barry Smith much?)



The inside front cover was created by Pat St.Amour as well...also done when *he* was just 16! (Pat went on to have art featured in *Heavy Metal* magazine in the mid-eighties and still paints today.)

2009 is Bustin' Loose All Over!
R. I. P. Bettie Page
Black & White in COLOR #5 : The CREATURE!

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I Power Blogger

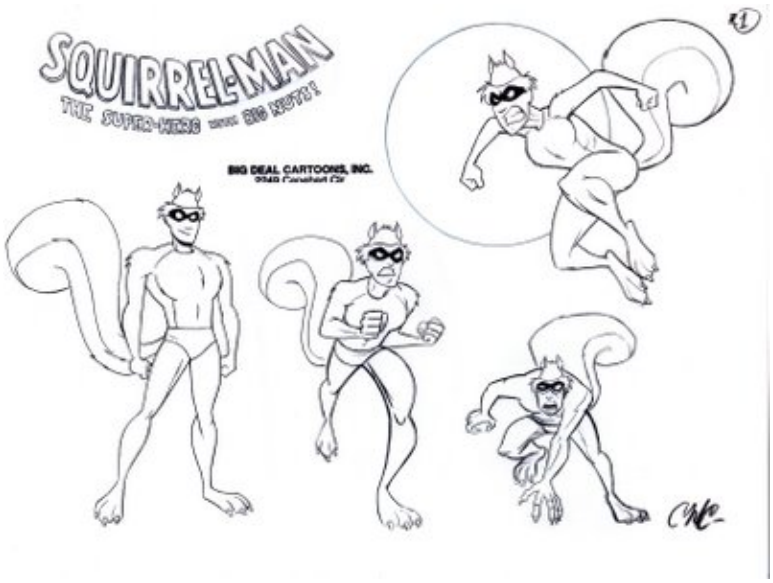
My big-ass contribution to the mag was the first back-up story featuring a character that I had created a few years earlier (in 1975) that was basically a spoof of Spider-Man; the continuing chronicles of a guy named Dewey Dimpster, known to [some of] the world as *The Astonishing Squirrel-Man!* The humor was very much along the lines of The Tick (but *way* before)...The storyline built to a climax that had the half-baked hero mixing it up with a delusional homeless man who calls himself *The Chameleon* (because he *thinks* he can turn into different people and things). Few people stop to watch the fight, less than that even care --just another day in New York City. Here's the first couple of pages...before I ran out of time and *zip-a-tone.*

(Man, my lettering *really* sucked!) I was just goofy enough back then to get some of the industry professionals of the day to whip up some sketches of ol' Squirrelly in attempts to smear some added credibility and/or legitimancy on the character. So here's a couple of *never-before seen* pro-sketches of S-Man now...both done around in 1979-'80. (I'd have one by John Byrne here too if he wasn't such a jerk to his fans back then...) First by the late, great Gil Kane! (who was super-nice and genuinely seemed to like the character.)

Paul Gulacy thought it was kinda funny too. I paid him for the sketch at the Atlanta summer con, but he ran out of time doing an impromptu Elvis Costello album cover and he wound up having to mail it to me (It showed up at my parents about a month later). I was really flattered that he put so much time and detail into it.

While in college in 1981 I started thinking about redesigning the character for animation. I think the old MGM Rudolph Ising cartoon *The Lonesome Stranger* had been on TBS that morning and wound up being an influence on this proposed retooling. (However my instructors --already annoyed that I tried to give half the assignments they gave me an animated *slant*-- assured me then and there that "*animation is a dead art form...it's way too expensive and time consuming for anybody with any sense to care anything about it ever again*". My last day of school they advised me that I had lots of potential, but I needed to "*grow up and forget about the Flintstones*". I couldn't leave fast enough.)

Then for 20 some odd years the drawings sat in a drawer...but in the summer of 2004 wound up pitching some older properties of mine including Squirrel-Man to Cartoon Network. I worked up some new materials for several show pitches (including the first piece in this post) including one I co-created with Dave Newton in 1983 *The Savage Fish*, and let 'em fly. Initially they were shot down, but there may be some hope yet.



So, a couple of months after my pitch I heard that Cartoon Network was working on a new show called *Squirrel Boy*. I inquired and was assured it was just a coincidence, and that he wasn't a Superhero or anything, -- just a dumb fat kid that hangs out with a squirrel. Still, any character called Squirrel-*blank* didn't make me feel any better, coincidence or not. NOW I pick up the latest issue of Marvel's *The Thing* (#8) and there's a character in it called *Squirrel-GIRL* and she *IS* a Superhero, and can communicate with Squirrels and junk.
I figured --that tears it...I'd better get on on the stick before there's a lawsuit...and I lose. (plus it's also an excuse to show the Realm art, and the unpublished Gil Kane and Paul Gulacy pieces to boot!) There's some other big pieces I did of SM and some Kirby-style cosmic villians my senior year of High school...If they don't make me puke when I finally find 'em I' ll take some pictures and run 'em in a later post.
So, for now...and for what it's worth... *ta-dah!*

posted by c. martin croker at 5:42 pm | 6 comments

saturday, july 29, 2006

The Wacky Lord of Latveria

MARVEL COMICS GROUP
WHAT IF
DR. DOOM
HAD BECOME A HERO?
HE WOULD STRUGGLE WITH MEPHISTO--
--AND HE WOULD SUFFER AS NO MAN HAS EVER SUFFERED BEFORE!

Ah, the Good Doctor. The undisputed leader of Latveria. Voted Big #1 more than once on Marvel Comics' all-time most villianous list, his list of recorded grievances agianst humanity if compiled would be longer than my arm. There is much I could write about the vexed son of a gypsy and sorceress...the complexity of his tortured character, or the cold darkness that surrounds his soul --or maybe even that he's marched straight into Hell more than once to retrieve his mother's soul, or that he's been one of the few mortals on earth to have ever had (albeit momentary) control over the Silver Surfer's *power cosmic!*
Yeah, I *could*... but that stuff wouldn't be *nearly* as good a goof as some of these incidents...

WITHOUT ANOTHER WORD, THE DRAMATIC BEING WHO HAS BECOME ABSOLUTE MONARCH OF THE KINGDOM OF LATVERIA, TURNS ON HIS HEEL AND WALKS THROUGH THE TINY VILLAGE, NEITHER SPEAKING NOR LOOKING LEFT NOR RIGHT.
MOMMY, LOOK! ISN'T THAT...?
HUSH, DEAR! YOU MUST BE SILENT WHEN THE MASTER PASSES!
GOOD DAY TO YOU, HERR DOCTOR!
OURS HAS BEEN A PROSPEROUS LAND SINCE HE HAS RULED US!
MAY YOU ENJOY GOOD HEALTH, MASTER!

Victor Von Doom! Introduced to the world by the team of Lee & Kirby in the pages of *Fantastic Four #5* as the ultimate armored arch-villian. An old schoolmate of the FF's leader Reed Richards, he became the perfect Professor Moriarty to Richards' Holmes. The indesputable and and aboslute Monarch of the *Universal-Studios*-looking Latveria, located somewhere in the heart of the Barvarian Alps. He would often stride

around the tiny kingdom like Walt at Disneyland after closing. The genius of Doom can only be matched by his ego --and *both* are reported to be off the charts. (And yet he has at times been misused and miscast, his character maligned with overwritten hackneyed monologues and psuedo-scientific gobblety-gook.) It's a green-faced Doom that stares down at our heroes, dwarfing them on this, his very first appearance and comic cover.

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!
12¢
THE Fantastic FOUR
5 JULY
"MEET... DOCTOR DOOM!"
WITH A TURN OF THIS DIAL, I SHALL DESTROY THE FOUR OF YOU, FOREVER!!
I'VE GOT TO REACH HIM! HE'S DRAINING THE AIR OUT OF THE ROOM! I CAN'T BREATHE! MY--MY STRENGTH IS EBBING!
AIR!! I GOTTA HAVE AIR!
MY FLAME IS DYING WITHOUT OXYGEN! I'M HELPLESS!
I MUST GET IN TO SAVE THEM! BUT HOW? HOW?!?

12¢
TALES OF SUSPENSE
31 JULY
WE CAN NEVER STOP THE MONSTER WITHOUT REMOVING HIS IRON MASK! BUT HOW CAN WE REMOVE IT?
HOW? HOW?!
THE MONSTER IN THE IRON MASK
WHAT STAGGERING SECRET DOES THE IRON MASK CONCEAL ???

...And right off the bat, the indignities ensue. For at virtually the same time that *FF* #5 was on the stands, this crazy Space-monkey made off with Doom's mask and ran amok in the pages of *Tales of Suspense* #31! (The really sad thing here is the Monkey got the better, more Doom-y color scheme. Oh, the unimaginable insolence... grumble...infantile mockery of it all!

(Off-topic FYI--More often than not...If it was a Jack Kirby monster from this period of time

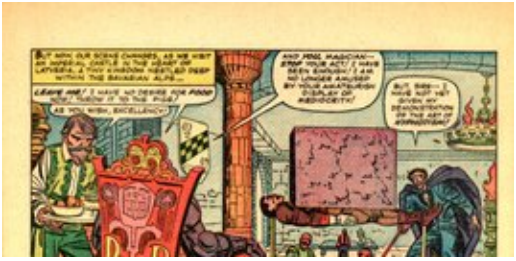
more often than not it wound up being colored orange (--Unless it was a robot...in that case it was usually grey.) An orange critter practically guaranteed a colorful (yet still limited) panel balance. That's also why Ben Grimm be orange.)

LOOK CAREFULLY AT MY KNOTTY FISH, AND THEN RUN AND TELL YOUR FELLOW EARTHLINGS ABOUT ME!
TELL THEM I HAVE BEEN SENT BY MY PLANET TO SOFTEN UP YOUR WORLD — TO MAKE IT RIPE FOR AN INVASION BY OUR ARMS!
I TELL THEM I AM ALL-POWERFUL!! FOR MY BODY IS OF A SUBSTANCE STRONGER THAN STEEL! I CAN SHATTER ANYTHING! AND NOTHING, NOTHING CAN HARM ME!!
MY ONLY WEAK SPOT IS THE FACT THAT I MUST BREATHE, EVEN AS YOU DO! THAT IS WHY I WEAR THIS ANTI-TIGHT IRON MASK, SO THAT YOU CANNOT DEFEAT ME WITH POISON GASES OR ANY DEADLY FUMES!
NOW GO! INFORM YOUR PEOPLE OF THE INVINCIBLE CONQUEROR WHO WALKS THERE EARTH!
I'LL TELL 'EM ALL RIGHT!
LAD, IS THIS SOME KIND OF JOKE?
AW! IT'S THE TRUTH, HONEST IT IS!
WE CAN'T TAKE ANY CHANCES THESE DAYS. ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE!
LET'S HAVE A LOOK, SIR!
IT ISN'T LONG BEFORE THE WORLD REALIZES THAT IN TRUTH THERE IS A MONSTER AMONG US! AND SO, HOURS LATER ...
HERE HE COMES!
HE'S JUST AS BIG AND HIDEOUS AS THE AIR SAID!
SHOULD WE OPEN FIRE?
NOT YET! FIRST WE'LL TRY TO TALK TO HIM — REASON WITH HIM!
BUT WORDS PROVE TO BE MEANINGLESS TO THE MENACING CREATURE IN THE IRON MASK!
THE MONSTER REFUSES TO GIVE UP HIS MISSION!
HE SAYS HE MUST EITHER FIGHT HIM OR SURRENDER TO HIM!
ALL RIGHT — HE'S ITCHING FOR A FIGHT — SO THAT'S WHAT HE'LL GET! ALERT ALL MILITARY UNITS!

Meanwhile there's the unmatched audacity of that smug son-of-a-bitch Reed Richards. Ever the fate-of-the-world-in-the-balance prankster Reed (reportedly the world's smartest man) has bested Doom on a number of occasions, but usually not by out-thinking him per se --he just tricks 'im! (In fact a *lot* of FF stories end with Reed just having to *bluff* his way out of whatever danger faces mankind.) Here's one of **my** particular faves, where Reed challenges Doom to a test of wills...*to the death*! (basically)... But not before he drugs poor Vic with a hallucinigen during a phoney toast beforehand. (...from *Fantastic Four Annual #2*)

THIS MACHINE WILL PROVE ONCE AND FOR ALL —
NO NEED TO EXPLAIN, RICHARDS! I CAN DEDUCE ITS FUNCTION MORE CLEARLY! REMEMBER, I AM EVERY BIT YOUR SCIENTIFIC EQUAL!
THAT, MY IRA-PLACABLE ENEMY, REMAINS TO BE SEEN!
REED! NOT THE ENCEPHALO-GUN!! NOT THAT!! YOU CAN'T!!
STAND BACK, SUE! IT'S THE ONLY WAY! IF I SHOULD LOSE, MY DARLING, REMEMBER I'VE LOVED YOU FROM THE FIRST! NOTHING CAN EVER CHANGE THAT!
FINE WORDS, RICHARDS! FROM ONE ABOUT TO DIE! BUT WITH THIS DEVICE SET AT FULL POWER, THE ONE WITH THE GREATER MENTALITY WILL SEND THE OTHER TO A TIMELESS LIMBO FROM WHICH THERE IS NO RETURN! AND NOW... BEGIN!!

So, (I love this part) Vic goes home to Latveria and never picks up a newspaper or listens to the radio or watches tv again. No more plans for world domination or ultimate power schemes. No more time machines or tidal wave makers or phone calls to the devil. Nope. It's time to use his unlimtied power to sit on his ass and play host to kind of a Latverian *"Who's got talent?* " with himself in the Simon Cowell role. When an aspiring magician inadvertantly breaks the "spell" that Richards put him under months ago...(*...from Fantastic Four#39)*



Yeeeeah, Gidda loada dem apples Mudda-fugga! You just been *Punk'd* -- Fantastic Four-style!
And what great reward awaits the magician who helped Vic see the light? *Bestowed!* --Buddy Rich-style! (As in "...I got the backa my hand for yer effin' brain is what I got for ya!")

TO THINK--IT TOOK A PETTY CHARLATAN LIKE YOU TO FREE ME FROM RICHARDS' HYPNOTIC SPELL!
AH, SIRE, IN YOUR GRATITUDE, I TRUST YOU WILL REWARD YOUR HUMBLE SERVANT MOST GENEROUSLY!
GRATITUDE?? SUCH WEAK WORDS ARE NOT FOR DOCTOR DOOM! HERE IS YOUR REWARD! BE GRATEFUL I DO NOT PUT YOU TO DEATH FOR KNOWING HOW I HAVE BEEN TRICKED!
WITHOUT ANOTHER WORD, THE OMINOUS FIGURE WHO IS ABSOLUTE RULER OF HIS REMOTE KINGDOM, ENTERS A UNIQUE GYROSCOPIC AIRCRAFT OF HIS OWN DESIGN, AND THEN...
THEIR PLAN WAS A BRILLIANT ONE! IF I THOUGHT I HAD DEFEATED THEM, I WOULD NEVER BOTHER TO ATTACK THEM AGAIN! THUS, THEY WERE SAFE FROM ME! SAFE, THAT IS-- UNTIL NOW!

You gotta hand it to Richards for sheer audaciousness. Here's a man who's smart enough to know that when the fate of the universe hangs in the balance, it's time to roll up your sleeves and take scissors to your comic books! Reed embraced this philosophy from very nearly the beginning as demonstrated here *way, way* back in Fantastic Four #2 when he and the rest of the FF report back to the Skrull Hi-commander --as Skrull soldiers "in disguise"...

THOSE ARE SOME OF EARTH'S MOST POWERFUL WARRIORS!
I PRAY HE DOESN'T SUSPECT THAT THEY'RE ACTUALLY CLIPPED FROM "STRANGE TALES" AND "JOURNEY INTO

...AND EARTH HAS THOUSANDS OF THOSE HIDDEN SPACE MINES WHICH WOULD DESTROY ANY INVADING ARMY!
NOT TO MENTION AN ARMY OF GIANT MONSTROUS INSECTS READY TO CRUSH ANY ALIEN INVASION!
INCREDIBLE!! UNBELIEVABLE! WE'VE GOT TO LEAVE THIS GALAXY AT ONCE, BEFORE THOSE TERRIFYING CREATURES DISCOVER US!
IF YOU HADN'T WARNED ME IN TIME, WE WOULD SURELY HAVE ALL BEEN SLAIN!
QUICKLY! SUMMON AND JOIN US AS WE LEAVE THIS ACCURSED PLANET FOREVER!
NO! WE MUST STAY BEHIND AND REMOVE ALL EVIDENCE OF OUR PRESENCE ON EARTH! WE SHALL SACRIFICE OURSELVES SO THAT YOU WILL BE SAFE!
NEVER IN OUR HISTORY HAS THERE BEEN SO NOBLE A DEED! TAKE THIS HIGHEST AWARD OF YOUR BRAVERY!
WHEW! YOU DON'T KNOW THE AWLAF OF IT, BROTHER!

I can only guess that being drawn by Kirby to begin with must make it harder to differentiate between photographs and panels clipped from a newsprint comic book...(Sheesh! That's some plan, Stretcho!) So ol' Reed musta hung onto those old comics with the missing panels because *years* later when the chips are down and Doom has gotten all Superfied and is running around in a giant-size form, guess where Reed turns for strength and inspiration? (*No, not the Bible!*)
(from *World's Greatest Comic Magazine* #12)

BUT PERHAPS THE EMPEROR OF EARTH HAS SPOKEN TOO SOON!
WHAT MADNESS IS THIS?
COMICBOOK MONSTERS! SURELY UNREAL!
THEY DARE TO ATTACK ME?!!

Yup, Reed goes right back his stash of clipped-up *Strange Tales* and *Journey Into Mystery* comics. (Okay, I honestly don't know what's weirder here...the fact that Reed knows all these obscure "comicbook" monsters by their names and subtitles, or that Doom does. ...Okay, Doom.)

REMEMBER HOW DOOM WAS ABLE TO CONTROL NAMOR?*
WELL, I MODIFIED HIS IONIC INANIMATE MATTER CONVERTER TO CONTROL THOSE COMICBOOK MONSTERS!
BY USING THESE HELMETS, WE CAN MAKE THE MONSTERS DO OUR BIDDING.
HOW'D YOU FIGURE OUT SUCH A COMPLICATED SCIENTIFIC PRINCIPLE SO FAST, REED?
HE MODESTLY OMITTED TELLING YOU ONE THING --
-- THE IONIC CONVERTER WAS REED'S INVENTION IN THE FIRST PLACE.
DOOM STOLE IT FROM HIM!
NUTS! WE WON'T EVEN NEED THESE GIZMOS. YOU'RE ALL GONNA TALK DOOM TO DEATH!
* IN ISSUES -- STRAIGHT-TALKIN' STAN
WHAT'RE YOU DOIN', WHITEY -- TRYIN' T' PLANT THAT THING 'N MAKE IT GROW?
I WISH IT WERE THAT SIMPLE.
THIS COSMIC TRANS-FORMULATOR CHANNELS MY POWER INTO EACH OF YOUR IONIC HELMETS.
BUT IF DOOM HAS THE MIGHT OF GALACTUS --
-- MY POWER MAY NOT BE ENOUGH!
THE EMPEROR OF EARTH WILL NOT BE STOPPED BY WITLESS COMICBOOK MONSTROSITIES!
NOW THEY SHALL FEEL THE AWESOME POWER OF DR. DOOM!

So, *both* these guys read the *same* "comicbooks", eh?

The audacity! The insufferable insolence! But such indignities don't end just with the accursed Fantastic Four. A multitude of super-powered interlopers have managed to be a thorn in the side of the Latverian Godfather. Daredevil himself has been a irritant more than once...There was that time that Doom managed to switch bodies with ol' Hornhead for a spell. (...from Daredevil #38)

Hey, it's lots easier to snap your fingers when you're not wearing metal gloves...

I SUSPECT I HAVE FOUND THE KEY TO DAREDEVIL'S UNIQUE ABILITY!
BY OBSCURING HIS NORMAL VISION, HE HAS FOUND A WAY TO ACTUALLY SHARPEN THE USE OF HIS OWN SENSES!*
IT'S MORE THAN I EVER DREAMT OF... MORE THAN I EVER DARED TO HOPE FOR---
I CAN SEE AGAIN!
BUT, NO TIME TO DWELL ON THAT NOW!
I'VE GOT TO MOVE FAST... BEFORE DOOM'S GUARDS REALIZE I'VE TRICKED THEM!
AND NOW, BACK TO THE EMBASSY...
*ALTHOUGH HE'S ON THE RIGHT TRACK, EVEN DOC DOOM DOESN'T SUSPECT THE ENTIRE, FANTASTIC TRUTH... NAMELY, THAT DD IS TOTALLY BLIND! --- SECRETIVE STAN.

Later when Doom's Henchmen grab who they think is Daredevil in the street, their out-of-body Boss let's 'em know who signs their paychecks in fairly short order.

Hornhead eventually has to (as Doom) basically declare war on the countries bordering Latveria to get Doom to cooperate...and cooperate he does! In fact he comes a-runnin'...especially since one of Latveria's neighbors is allied with Red China and he's way-afraid of being "overrun in hours by *Red Chinese*!"(In fact, that's all He thought about during the *cab-ride* over!)

It amuses Doom to be beaten? Hyok! Wotta riot!

Of course, I *love* Wally Wood art from the ground up...But when Doom first faced off against the Red Skull in *Astonishing Tales #4*, Wally gave us an unusual glance at some of Doom's noctural habits. Nothing like a soft beddy-bye when you're wearing body armor.

Ahhhh, he had it comin'... (So, Vic takes *off* the gloves but sleeps with the mask *on*?)

Okay, I saved the best for last...There was this time in 1973 (that just happened to coincide with zenith of blaxploitation cinema) when Doom came up agianst Marvel's premeire jive-talkin' Superbad-ass Luke Cage, otherwise known as *Power-Man!* Cage virtually hijacks one of the FF's aircraft to go and beat on VVD in his own castle no less. And why you ask? Simple. Doom owes Cage money...two hundred big ones...yep...two hundred big-buckaroonies... 200$!! (...From *Hero For Hire #9*!)

Say, how much was jet fuel in 1973?

(I should note that this is the the only time *I* can ever remember a large black man calling Dr. Doom "Honey".)

So Cage was just startin' to clean Doom's clock when the Big Orange here shows up to do Vic in. Cage knows he can't get dough from a corpse, so he shifts gears and keeps Orangey from blowing out Doom's ...uh...pilot light.

TO SPEED MY RETREAT, I LEAVE MY HUMANOID BODY AND EXIST IN MY NATURAL FORM.
HAVE NO FEAR, DOCTOR -- THE INANIMATE FIGURE WILL NOT EXPLODE. I DID NOT EXPECT TO LOSE THIS ENCOUNTER.
I THINK... MAYBE THIS GO-ROUND I'VE SEEN EVERYTHING... A LA MODE.
TO YOUR FEET, CAGE! YOU CAN STILL CATCH HIM!
I GOT NO QUARREL WITH HIM. HE COULD'A CHILLED ME, AN' DIDN'T.
I'M BETTIN' HE THOUGHT THAT OUT, TOO!
BESIDES, BABY-- YOU AIN'T PAID ME FOR THE FIRST JOB YET!
22

Doom laughin'?...And nobody danglin' over a lava pit or nothin'? Creepy. Plus it looks like all the furniture in Castle Doom is chock-full American currency (much like the furniture in the Addams Family house was.)

HAHAHAHA! YOU ARE THE ULTIMATE, CAGE! I HAVE NEVER SEEN YOUR LIKE!
WOULD IT DO ME ANY GOOD TO TRY TO HIRE YOU FOR THIS NEW ASSIGNMENT?
UH-UH. WORKIN' FOR YOU IS A STONE DRAG!
MAY I THANK YOU FOR SAVING MY LIFE!
YEAH! BUT DON'T. IF YOU'D GOTTEN DEAD, THERE'D BE NO BODY FOR ME TO COLLECT FROM!
I PREFERRED THE REASON YOU GAVE THE FACELESS ONE! STILL, YOU HAVE AMPLY EARNED MY RESPECT THIS DAY, AND IT IS MORE DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN THAN MY FUNDS-- WHICH ARE NOT EASY TO OBTAIN!
TAKE WHAT YOU SAY I OWE YOU-- AND THEN GO!
STICKLY, CAGE COUNTS THROUGH THE CRISP GREEN BILLS, UNTIL $200 GROWS IN THE PALM OF HIS HAND. AFTER THAT HE SIMPLY, SILENTLY TURNS AWAY!
FOLLOW THE PATH WORN IN THE STONE, CAGE. NO ONE WILL MOLEST YOU!
-- IT IS AN ESCAPE ROUTE KNOWN ONLY TO MYSELF!
DO NOT LOOK BACK, CAGE! DO NOT COME BACK!

Perhaps it was incidents like these that had a direct effect on prompting this next out-of-character royal endorsement.

Do You Know Me?
Though I rule over Latveria with a fist of iron, I find that when I'm outside my native country my face isn't well known
That's why when I'm not carrying out plans of world conquest I'm carrying this . . .
LATVERIAN EXPRESS
LATVERIAN EXPRESS
Don't leave home without it.

Bah...That's quite enough indignation and contemptuous impudence for

now!
Doom turns and heads back to his castle...walking under the curved archway visible in almost every Frankenstein movie...

AND SO, THE AWESOME FIGURE CONTINUES HIS WALK, SHOWING HIMSELF TO HIS SUBJECTS, WHILE HIS MIND DWELLS ON MATTERS WHICH ARE FAR BEYOND THEIR SIMPLE COMPREHENSION! AND THEN...
NOW WE SHALL RETURN TO THE CASTLE!
YES, MASTER!
AGAIN HE LOCKS HIMSELF WITHIN HIS LABORATORY! AND, WHEN HE EMERGES ONCE MORE, WHO KNOWS WHAT NEW MENACE WILL HAVE BEEN CREATED, TO THREATEN MANKIND!!!
THROUGH THE LONG, SILENT NIGHTS, IN THAT BARREN CASTLE, HALF-HIDDEN IN THE ISOLATED KINGDOM OF LATVERIA, DOCTOR DOOM WORKS, AND PLANS, AND BROODS! AND, WHEN HIS WORK IS FINALLY FINISHED...THEN LET THE WORLD BEWARE!!

(All characters copyright Marvel Comics Group.)
(Which reminds me --I've always thought that Jack Kirby's Latveria looked a helluva lot like Universal-International's fictional Frankenstein village of Vassaria. We know at least some of Jack's inspiration came from stuff he saw on the TV set he left on all night while he was working...and a good number of the Universal Horror films were on NYC Television all the time when he was working on these early concepts. (Not to mention Jack saw villages like that for real in WW2.) In fact, the very name Latveria seems almost like a combination of the words Latvia ...and Vassaria! Coincidence?...Y'never know...)
But here's to Stan, Jack, and their Pinnacle of power and pomposity... Long may he reign.
(Maybe next time we talk about what's under the mask...and according to whom.)

My thanks to Robert Pope & Tony Aguirre for supplying some of the comics and insights used in this post.

posted by c. martin croker at 8:19 pm | 8 comments

thursday, july 27, 2006

San Diego Con 2006

Okay, some of you have noticed I've been a little lax in my postings as of late. Well I've been busy with different projects, and I found out just a week before it started that Adult Swim wanted me to attend the San Diego Comic-Con. Naturally I had to scramble to make room in my schedule, but there was no way I wasn't going if invited. With a conservative estimate of 125,000 attendees it was more than *ever* a total sensory overload --and virtually impossible to see or do everything the show offers. I missed the *Ed Roth movie* premiere (though it was reported to me by TCM's John Miller that it was *really* worth seeing --despite a considerable amount of lackluster Rat-Fink after-effects "animation") and the *Lost* panel, but I did get some face time with tons of other industry professionals including *Robot Chicken*'s Seth Green, Tom Kinney (Mr. Squarepants) and the great Ray Harryhausen himself.

Of course it wouldn't be Comic-Con without tons of announcements and revelations. Sam L. Jackson and cast were on hand for a preview of the

internet-born *Snakes on a Plane* flick, Batman master Bruce Timm inadvertantly announced that his next project for Warners is (apparently) going to be *The Death of Superman*, animatic clips from the upcoming *Simpsons* movie were shown to the public for the first time, Robert "Triumph" Smigel hobnobbed with John Kricfalusi, and Sam Raimi and the entire cast of *Spider-Man 3* showed up with a new *Venom*-fueled extended trailer and lots of fresh insights about the film. Kirsten Dunst let it slip her character Mary Jane Watson will be made off with by Topher Grace's *Vemon* at some point in the film. (It was even hinted that Bruce Campbell may have an as-yet-unannounced role as the old-school Spidey Villian *Mysterio!)* 5 new posters featuring the film's main players were unveiled -- here's what the Topher/Vemon one looks like at least...

As for Harry Osborne and his chances of becoming a new version of the Green Goblin that *doesn't* suck...well, read 'em and weep...
According to the *Boston Globe*:"Raimi also revealed that Harry Osborn (James Franco) would become a third villain, taking on some of the powers of his father, the Green Goblin (Willem Dafoe), who was killed in the first "Spider-Man" film.

And according to the *Ain't It Cool* website:- Regarding Harry Osborn. Riami said he is NOT Green Goblin II and he is NOT Hobgoblin, but something else. He wouldn't say any more than he is still very upset about his father's death and he does use his father's technology to go after Spider-Man.

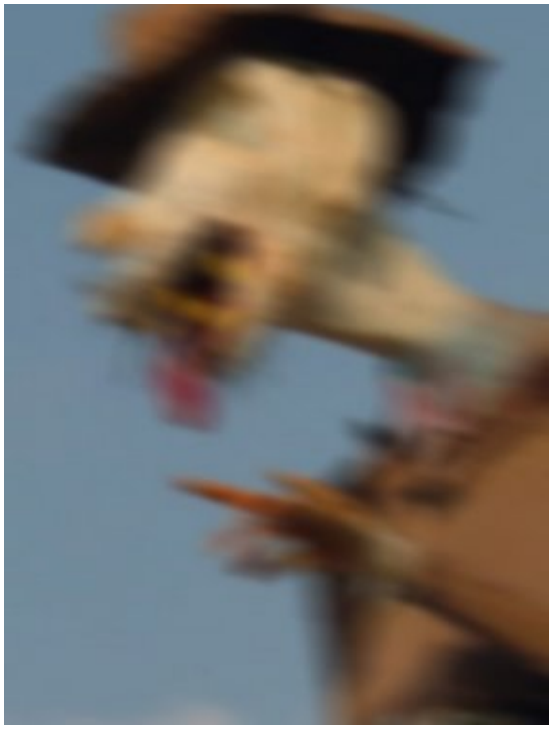
Snort! All I have to say is that if after 3 Mega-buck Spider-Man movies this effin' TRUCK winds up bein' the best version of the Green Goblin on film *I'm gonna be pissed!*

Nuff said, True Believer!

posted by c. martin croker at 12:36 pm | 2 comments

monday, july 17, 2006

Goat-Man with a Wrench



Yeow! What the hell was that? How many visitors to Buford Ga have asked that question while whizzing north on Buford Highway? I know I did the first time I laid eyes on him. But "Chas" --as it says on his pocket-- is a local cast-iron icon and landmark. Most of the people I know who know of him just refer to him as Chas. He stands out front of R & R Auto-parts as he has for more than 35 years, waving with rusty fingers to all who pass by.

Standing over ten feet tall on an 18 foot base, what Chas is exactly, or

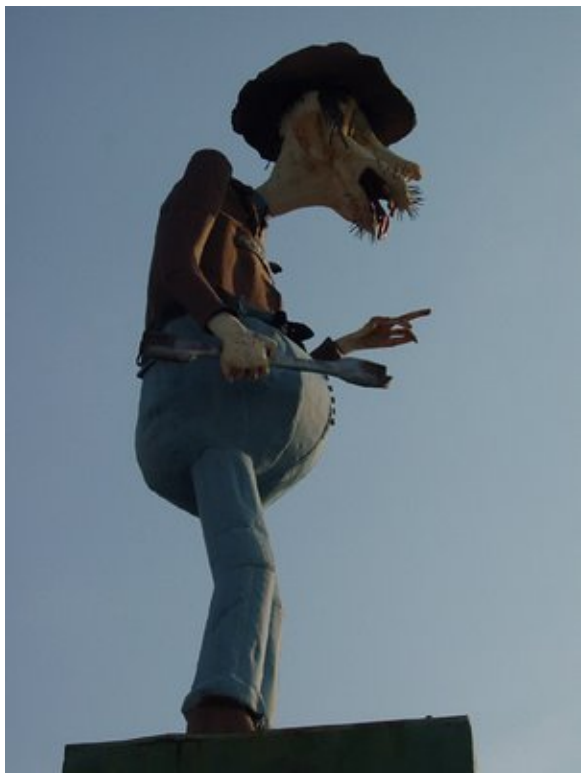
who built him remains a mystery. I always figured there was a Rat-Fink/ Weird-o's connection there somewhere (In fact, I was going to call this post "Ten Foot Weirdo"). However, Nick --the guy I talked to when I called R & R Auto parts-- officially described Chas as "A Goat-Man with a wrench" and gave me my title. He also told me that Chas had originally been a work comissioned by Bob Slack, (the owner of R & R back then) to give customers something to look for when they drove up the then-very-rural Buford highway. Nick said he still fields several calls a week about ol' Chas (he is NOT for sale, so don't ask) and that he was originally constructed and plunked out front of R & R in or around 1972 or '73.

That he was built in the early 70's explains a lot, actually. There was a lot of big figural stuff popping up everywhere in the southeast during that period of time.. It was as if a Panama City Beach mentality had rolled inland and washed over the landscape. On unassuming South Cobb drive (in my hometown of Smyrna) alone there was: an old Chevy out front of a garage that had been ironworked into a monster car with bloody teeth in it's hood and the legs of a mannequin pedestrian hanging out of it's "mouth", and just a mile or so down the road one of the best Goofy Golf courses I've ever seen in my LIFE. Comprised of no less than 3 separate 18 hole courses, the whole place had just recently been redone to include giant jack-o-lanterns, storybook characters, monsters and several 2/3rds scale Dinosaurs (including a few based directly on the then-brand-new *Aurora "Prehistoric Scenes"* kits). One hole even featured a two-chambered cave (also *Aurora* based) with a glowing large-scale *Mysterious Island*-type "Giant Bird" in the second chamber. It was *so* cool I often wondered if I might be in a coma and just living a dream. (Especially since these fiberglass Dinos happened to pop virtually across the street from Cobb Center mall, where I saw *One MIllion Years B. C.* when I was four, and later that year in the same parking lot, the FULL-SIZE *1964 World's Fair Dinosaurs* visited when they toured the country on flatbed trucks with

the matching 25 cent wax dinosaur makers.) Okay I digress, but my point is that all this was in just my little hometown! --All within about three miles of my folks' house! It was a golden age for this kind of crap. Too bad so much of it is gone, now . Progress has claimed much of the land, and fiberglass and sustained Sunlight are ultimately a poor mix. Lucky for us Chas is welded together, so he should be around for awhile to come. I think I first saw him 1983 he was really rusty and faded with this Texas-Chainsaw thing goin' on. His delapidated state actually made him considerably more sinister. By the end of the eighties he was a real fright! When he disappeared from his original 8 foot pedestal for awhile around 1991-92 we began to fear the worst...but he soon returned, repaired and repainted with a friendlier pallette, (though even *that* paint-job has now faded quite a bit) and re-mounted on a much higher, less-accessable pedestal --where he still stands today...

CHAS

CHAS.



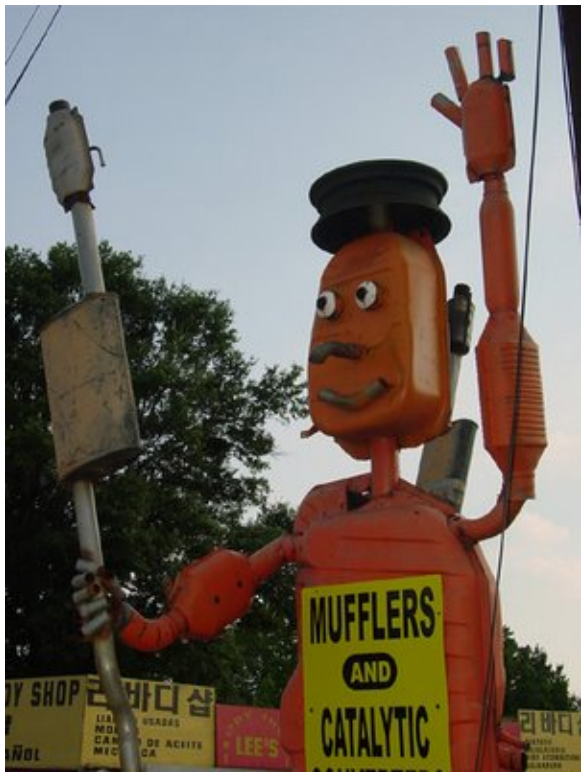
All That Chas

Naturally Chas has been an ongoing influence on a lot of local artists, myself included. Somewhere around here I have an Ed Roth-style Chas I did in the late '80's, driving a flame-spewing, rusty hot-rod complete with customary giant gear shift poking out of the roof. If I can dig that up I'll add it later -- but for now, here's a couple of other Chas art pieces.

...part of a pen & ink piece by Tony Aguirre

...And the spirit of Chas continues! Right down the road (literally about half a mile) some other folks are getting into the act with their own home-grown metal mascot. No name-tag on this guy so we just call 'im the *Muffler Man*. He say Howdy!

Are there some nutty throwback outsider-advertising "Junk-Men" in your town? Send me a pic and I'll run 'em in a follow-up piece!



Bye, Folks!

posted by c. martin croker at 10:40 pm | 3 comments